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The Secretary,  
Inquiry into Regional and Rural Radio Services,  
House Committee on Communication, Transport and the Arts,  
Parliament House,  
Canberra ACT 2600.

### **Submission to the Inquiry.**

My submission concerns future trends in radio broadcasting, and how this affects emergency services in regional and rural areas of Australia. In particular I wish to draw the attention of the House Communications Committee to a significant problem with current medium-wave broadcast transmitters and how this greatly diminishes communications to rural and regional people during times of severe weather and/or natural disasters. I welcome this inquiry, and hope it leads to the problem being mitigated or removed entirely.

### Background

For their public broadcast services, much of regional and rural Australia is reliant on transmitters owned and operated by NTL Australia Pty Ltd, which broadcast (primarily) ABC generated radio programmes. For coverage of rural areas, high power medium-wave transmitters are commonly used, as these give coverage over a wide area and are therefore particularly suitable for rural communities.

### The Problem

For many years now, these transmitters have operated as automatic, unstaffed entities, monitored remotely by NTL in Sydney, and maintained by contractors in the nearby area. Medium wave transmitter masts are especially vulnerable to static build-up during severe weather, or with the approach of a weather front. This seriously affects the performance of the transmitter, and so they are generally fitted with automatic devices that sense static build up and automatically reduce the transmitters output power to lessen the likelihood of damage until the static build up dissipates.

The difficulty of this is that as the transmitter power is stepped down, the effective range of the broadcast is proportionately reduced. The result is that when transmitters are most urgently required to broadcast warnings and emergency advice to the public, they have often significantly reduced their output power, sometimes completely.

In recent years I have seen severe weather warnings (including bush-fire alerts) unable to be adequately broadcast because of this automatically reduced transmitter output. Not only can this potentially cause loss of life, but has significant ramifications for the farming sector and other weather-affected industries.

In rural and regional areas, which are particularly dependent upon medium wave broadcasts, this is a significant problem that needs addressing. In anticipating future trends for rural broadcasting, it would be hoped that this issue could be highlighted as a significant one, with the aim of finding a solution.

It is my understanding that this static build-up on medium wave transmitter masts is a fault condition resulting from installations in years past where the manufacturer's recommendations were left short. Whatever the cause, it has left rural and regional areas in the untenable position of being at times unable to receive vitally important emergency information. It is therefore essential that future trends for rural broadcasting take this into account and ensure continuity of broadcasts at all times.

(signed)

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Adelaide.